



Testimony to the Senate Committee on Labor and Business

In support of Senate Bill 592 – February 14, 2023

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

On behalf of Beyond Toxics and the thousands of Oregonians who support our work across the state, I'm writing to express strong support for SB 592 to improve workplace safety and worker health in Oregon. Beyond Toxics is an Oregon-based statewide nonprofit providing leadership to build a community-driven environmental justice movement for a thriving and just Oregon.

As an environmental justice and health organization, we've talked to many Oregon workers about dangerous conditions in the workplace. Many of them have described coercion tactics from managers to not report workplace injuries or risky working conditions, and to not report their injuries to a medical professional.

For example, a worker at a mill in Garibaldi was suffering chronic health ailments from repeated exposure to a fumigant that was being used to treat wood being shipped overseas to Japan. Many other workers were impacted as well, and reported swollen eyes, hacking coughs, rashes and difficulty breathing. When he reported this to his manager, he was told that "guys like you are a dime a dozen, so if you don't like it, we can just replace you." This worker and his co-workers were afraid to report the situation to Oregon OSHA for fear of losing their jobs.

I've also talked to a group of loggers who were exposed to herbicide sprays while on the job site in Douglas County. When they filed a complaint with OSHA, the resulting inspection was very cursory and relied mostly on comments from the company owner, but not the workers who were impacted. Perhaps if SB 592 had been in place, they would have complained again when the same dangerous situation occurred in hopes of getting a more thorough inspection.

SB 592 would trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year *or* an occupational death occurs. In addition, SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal to make all workplaces in Oregon safer. Oregon OSHA needs to have the authority to assess a meaningful penalty when an injury or death occurs as a result of a serious safety and health violation like a lack of training, equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety gear like harnesses or hard hats. And workers need stronger legal protection from retaliation when reporting unsafe working conditions.

Beyond Toxics urges the Committee members to take urgent action protect Oregon's workers. I urge your support for SB 592.

Sincerely,

Lisa Arkin, Executive Director, Beyond Toxics

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